

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Proclamation on 150th Anniversary of Lincoln's Inauguration

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
March 4, 2011

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INAUGURATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

President Abraham Lincoln is revered in American history as the leader who held together a fractured country and liberated millions from slavery. His words are memorized by America's schoolchildren, and his name is synonymous with freedom and unity. One hundred fifty years ago, on March 4, 1861, this self-taught man, rugged rail-splitter, and humble lawyer from Springfield, Illinois, was sworn in as our Nation's 16th President under an unfinished dome of the United States Capitol, with the storm clouds of civil war gathering.

President Lincoln reminded us in his Inaugural Address that America's Union was much older than the Constitution itself, and that our national fabric had been stitched together by shared memories and common hopes. As we observe the 150th anniversary of his Inauguration, we reflect on his unceasing belief and our enduring faith that we remain one Nation and one people, sharing a bond as Americans that will never break.

Through simple eloquence and humble leadership marked by profound wisdom — both on his Inauguration day and throughout the coming conflict — President Lincoln charted a course to transcend our discord and bind the wounds of a severed country. From the principles he set forth in the Emancipation Proclamation to his transformative address on the fields of Gettysburg, President Lincoln showed us how to preserve and perfect "the last, best hope of Earth." His actions and his memory enabled America to move beyond a young collection of States to become a free and unified Nation, striving for the promises and principles for which so many fought and died.

Our revered 16th President taught us that we are more than North and South, black and white — we are one, and we are all Americans. The forces that divide us are not stronger than the forces that unite us, and the "new birth of freedom" President Lincoln called for still echoes in each of our hearts. Today, we live in the Union he saved, inheritors of the freedoms and progress for which he

served. Through the ages, Abraham Lincoln calls us to take a renewed devotion to the unfinished work remaining before our Nation — joining together across all divides to ensure that "government of the people, by the people, for the people" endures in our time.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim March 4, 2011, as a day to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Inauguration of Abraham Lincoln. I call upon all Americans to observe this day with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities that honor his memory and uphold the principles he so nobly advanced.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fourth day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand eleven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fifth.

BARACK OBAMA

United States Joins International Renewable Energy Agency

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
March 4, 2011

MEDIA NOTE

The United States Joins the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)

The United States today deposited its instrument of acceptance to join the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), becoming the 63rd member. IRENA formed in 2009 in response to growing international interest in the adoption of renewable energy technologies to meet the challenges of sustained economic growth, energy security and climate change. IRENA's mission is to support and expedite member countries' transition to greater renewable energy use by helping identify and facilitate adoption of appropriate and optimal policies, business practices and technologies.

To date, 148 countries are IRENA signatories. The United States is the 63rd country to ratify the IRENA statute.

Headquartered in the United Arab Emirates, IRENA is the first truly international organization based in an Arab country. In addition to the Headquarters in Abu Dhabi, IRENA also has a Liaison Office in Vienna, Austria, and an IRENA Innovation and Technology Center in Bonn, Germany.

Don't Call Mideast Unrest a "Facebook Revolution," Panelists Say

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Social media may have provided an important tool for the political upheaval in the Arab world, but participants on a panel of Arab and American media experts say the discussion over its role should not divert attention from the courage being shown by people standing up for their rights.

The question of whether what is occurring is a "Facebook" or "Twitter" revolution is a "silly debate," said Michael Nelson, a professor of Internet studies at Georgetown University.

"At the end of the day, the Internet is not causing this revolution, but it is enabling it," just as the invention of the printing press in the 15th century helped spread the Protestant Reformation in Europe by making it easier to share information, he said.

Nelson was speaking with a group of media personalities and experts at a March 1 panel discussion in Washington hosted by the Center for International Media Assistance and the National Endowment for Democracy.

U.S. officials, including President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, have paid tribute to those who used nonviolent protest to overthrow regimes that had ruled Tunisia and Egypt for decades. Obama praised Egyptians for their display of "the power of human dignity," and Clinton said the protesters have inspired the American people.

Speaking on the panel, Egyptian journalist and blogger Mona Eltahawy said Facebook and Twitter "did not invent courage," but they allowed people from different sectors of society who had been critical of their governments to connect with each other and take action.

She said people who argue that the unrest was sparked by either social media or the WikiLeaks publication of classified U.S. cables describing abuses by Arab governments are implicitly denying the universal human will for freedom.

"When you say it was WikiLeaks or when you say it was Facebook, you are basically saying that these people who, for years, have been denied freedom and dignity and who are now demanding that freedom and dignity, [that] it was something outside of them that told them 'Hey, you must rise up.'"

But Eltahawy did not discount the importance of social media. She said many in the Middle East and North

Africa are highly net-savvy and are using Facebook "in ways that you could never imagine" for political causes, including the promotion of gay rights and women's rights.

She said she is very encouraged by the changes taking place in the region.

"I'm a foolish optimist, maybe, but I embrace the foolishness because it is a fantastic time right now. ... The region has its opportunity to breathe and say 'Let's fix this,'" she said.

Amira Maaty of the National Endowment for Democracy said it is important for the international community to support the democratic character of the Internet, but it is "more important to support the activists that drive it, the innovators who first thought of connecting new media with social change."

She encouraged U.S. and other institutions to work directly with Egyptian civil society as it transitions to a new era.

"The Egyptians are seeking a system that will ensure that the pharaohs remain in their ancient history and allows them to choose, challenge and change their leaders, and it is important to support them in developing the institutions and structures that allow that to happen," she said.

Abderrahim Foukara, the Washington bureau chief of Al Jazeera satellite television, argued that social media have been important, but people needed more traditional media outlets to help put the many tweets, YouTube videos and Facebook postings on the unrest into context.

"Social media provided the dots, but it took conventional media, principally television, to connect those dots, and that's when the picture became complete," Foukara said.

To make the Internet a truly democratic platform, Foukara said, there is a need to increase literacy and to educate older generations on how they can participate.

Nelson said that rather than creating new social media platforms for people to interact on, "it's a matter of telling people what's available and letting the courageous people in these countries get online."

He also warned of the need for users to remain vigilant in order to keep the Internet free.

"The good news is that the barriers to entry are so much lower now. The bad news is that politicians still do everything they can to avoid giving more reign to people who can tell their citizens what's really going on," he said.

Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy, closed the panel discussion by saying that the significance of the current "Arab awakening" is profoundly important to people around the world, not just in the Middle East.

"This revolution ... made by the people, by non-Western people, will travel to other regions in the world in a very powerful way," he said.

He urged his listeners to "do everything we can to help those young people who showed such courage, and others, to build democracy," warning that the creation of a true democracy will take a long time and will be "very, very difficult."

Global Food Prices Reach Record High in February

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Global food prices reached a record-high level in February, driven mainly by higher prices for cereals, meat and dairy products. The increases have raised concerns that millions more people could be pushed further into poverty and civil unrest could result, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

The FAO said in a March 3 report that its Food Price Index rose for the eighth consecutive month in February, up 2.2 percent from January. This is the highest it has been since January 1990, when the index was first begun. The FAO price index measures monthly changes in international prices for a basket of food commodities, which includes cereal, oils and fats, dairy products, meat and sugar.

"Except for sugar, prices of all other commodity groups monitored registered gains in February with dairy products and cereals climbing the most," the Rome-based agency said.

The monthly report said the following:

- The Cereal Price Index, which includes prices of main food staples such as wheat, rice and maize, rose by 3.7 percent in February, the highest level since July 2008.
- The FAO Dairy Price Index was up 4 percent in February from January, but well below its peak in November 2007.
- The FAO Oils/Fats Price Index rose marginally in February to a level just below the peak recorded in June 2008.
- The FAO Meat Price Index was up 2 percent in February from January. But the FAO Sugar Price Index in February was slightly below the previous month but still 16 percent higher than in February 2010.

The FAO said high food prices and the global economic recession pushed an additional 115 million people into poverty and hunger. By 2009, the total number of hungry people in the world had reached 1 billion, the FAO said. New global figures indicate that the number of hungry has fallen slightly to 925 million since then, the FAO said.

"And the cost of basic food staples remains high in many developing countries, making life difficult for the world's poorest people, who already spend between 60 and 80 percent of their meager income on food," the FAO said.

The State Department said in a fact sheet on international agricultural commodity prices that world wheat prices have jumped sharply over the last seven months.

"Global wheat production and quality have been plagued by adverse weather conditions in Russia, Europe, Canada and Australia," the State Department said. "Supplies have been further constrained by export restrictions in Russia and Ukraine."

U.S. corn export prices have risen by 70 percent since June 2010 as strong domestic and foreign demand compete for tightening supplies in the United States, Argentina and Brazil, the State Department said. By contrast, rice prices have moved upward modestly in the last seven months.

Another concern cited by the FAO is the sharp increase in global oil prices. Oil prices jumped to more than \$100 a barrel across financial markets in February as the result of concern about supply disruptions in the aftermath of civil strife in Libya. Food prices are affected by oil prices, from the cost of food production to the cost of transporting the food to market.

"Unexpected oil price spikes could further exacerbate an already precarious situation in food markets," said David Hallam, director of the FAO's trade and market division. "This adds even more uncertainty concerning the price outlook just as plantings for crops in some of the major growing regions are about to start."

The U.S. Agriculture Department has forecast that food prices will continue increasing over the long term, driven by rising demand from income growth in developing countries. It follows several decades of low commodity prices that discouraged investment and innovation in production technology.

In the 2007–2008 period, the spike in global food prices contributed to food insecurity worldwide and civil unrest in several nations, and generated appeals for food aid from 36 countries, the State Department said in a fact sheet.

After the sharp spike in food prices in that period,

President Obama pledged \$3.5 billion to help poor nations fight hunger by investing in agricultural development. What grew from that was the U.S. Feed the Future Initiative, which uses innovation, research and development to improve farm productivity, link farmers to local and regional markets, enhance nutrition and build safety nets, the State Department said.

“These investments will increase the supply of food where it is needed and help vulnerable people withstand price shocks better,” the department said in a fact sheet on the initiative. One of the positions of the Obama administration is that the United States will continue to provide food aid during crises, but help nations develop a lasting solution to end hunger with a long-term commitment to agricultural growth, the department said.

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